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SUBJECT: IFRC: STRUGGLING WITH NEW APPROACH TO MIGRATION

REF: GENEVA 692

**¶11. (SBU) Summary:** The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) recently appointed Thomas Linde to the newly created position of Special Representative on Migration. Charged with the task of developing a policy document for the IFRC and the national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Linde is struggling to pull together coherent guidelines for societies that often hold contradictory approaches and views as to how best the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement can respond to the humanitarian challenges of international migration.

Moreover, Linde is saddled with a Migration Reference Group (MRG) that is heavily tilted towards Europe in its geographic representation and a focus on Africa-to-Europe migration and he admits he is unlikely to meet his first deadline to have a policy framework document ready in time for the November IFRC Governing Board meeting. Nevertheless, Linde seems excited by the challenge and has promised to take a pragmatic approach that will involve other national societies, such as the American Red Cross, in the policy debate. End Summary.

**¶12. (U) Refugee Officer (RefOff) met with Thomas Linde, recently appointed as Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration for the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Linde comes to this newly created position having most recently served as Head of the UN Mission in Sudan (2005-2007). He has an extensive professional background within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and worked on asylum issues with the Swiss government earlier in his career. Linde took up his new duties on July 1. (Note: A more detailed description of Linde's professional background is included reftel. End note.)**

¶13. (SBU) Linde said his main task in the coming months is to prepare a policy framework for the IFRC that will guide the national societies working on international migration. Linde said that he is technically required to have such a framework document ready for the next IFRC Governing Board meeting in November, but believes he will likely have his document ready only by the time of the spring 2009 Governing Board meeting. He said that many national societies have different and often contradictory approaches to the migration issue and that he will need to hone these views into a single, practical set of guidelines for all national societies. He acknowledged that many past IFRC policy documents have proven to not be so useful and recognizes that he will not be able to impose his product on the national societies. At the same time, Linde highlighted that the request for a Migration Policy grew out of the regional discussions held by the national societies and he is confident that he can strike the right balance.

¶14. (SBU) RefOff asked Linde if he could elaborate on the type of activities he envisioned national societies conducting, noting that the U.S. believes IFRC might be stepping outside of its traditional mandate in taking up international migration as a issue for the organization. Linde underlined that IFRC's roll is not to interpret an auxiliary role for national societies nor does IFRC wish to establish a framework that would encourage national societies

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to take on a migration management role for governments. He cited, as an example, the Canadian Red Cross, which conducts migrant detention visits in Canada. Although he believes this is a positive example of cooperation between one national society and its government, he believes some national societies are so close to their governments that he would not want to see these societies conducting detention visits.

¶15. (SBU) RefOff noted however that the Council of Delegates resolution on International Migration, passed in November 2007, calls on national societies to provide services to vulnerable migrants "throughout the entire migratory cycle," including return and reintegration. RefOff stated that this seemed to be a very broad statement and explained that the U.S. believes other organizations, particularly the International Organization for Migration (IOM), are better placed to work with governments on many activities. Linde affirmed that he had no intention of pitting IFRC and the national societies in competition with organizations such as IOM, but would instead focus on the real humanitarian needs that migrants often suffer during the migration process.

Migration Reference Group

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¶16. (SBU) Linde said the he will hold the first meeting of the Migration Reference Group (MRG) on September 24. He stressed that IFRC President had appointed the members of the MRG before he came on board, noting that it is too big and unbalanced, but that it is too late for him to change the composition of the MRG (Note: MRG members are national Red Cross societies as outlined below). He assured RefOff that the MRG was only a sounding board and that his office will establish the actual policy framework (Linde currently has one assistant working with him and he will soon add two more staff). Linde also acknowledged that the American Red Cross (ARC) had expressed its dissatisfaction at not having been named to the MRG, and he readily admitted there is a real "danger of a European" slant in IFRC's approach as reflected in the current MRG membership. Linde said he will open up a consultative dialogue with ARC and other important national societies alongside that of the MRG.

¶17. (U) Linde listed the following national societies as MRG

members:

- The Americas: Canada, Haiti, Ecuador.
- Africa: Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Somalia, Sudan.
- Europe: Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, France, UK.
- Asia: Australia, the Philippines.

Coordination With the National Societies

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¶8. (U) RefOff asked how Linde would carry out the regional consultative process as outlined in the Plan 2008-2009 document. Linde said that he will work directly with the newly established Zone Offices who in turn will coordinate with the national societies in their respective regions to help prioritize activities and input for the IFRC migration policy. (Note: See reftel for the location of IFRC's Zone Offices. End note.) He also hopes the Zone Offices will set up migration sub-groups with the national societies to ensure

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continuity of the work. However, he noted there will only be one regional consultative meeting before his policy document will be finalized. This will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from October 19-22. Linde confirmed there will be a Migration Working Group at the Conference.

Comment

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¶9. (SBU) Although the "Together for Humanity" declaration passed at the 30th International Conference last November highlighted international migration as a new policy focus area for the Movement, Linde is still struggling with the type of activities he imagines should form the backbone of that policy. Despite his assurances to the contrary, it is not clear to us at this stage how he can shake loose from the "European" drive behind this initiative, which is mostly focused on Africa-to-Europe migration flows. Nevertheless, Linde seems to be genuinely interested in hearing opposing views and is looking for ways to work constructively with important national societies left out of the process up to now, including the American Red Cross.

TICHENOR